

Soldiers Must Relearn Expeditionary Skills for the Next Fight

Expeditionary battlefield logistics takes us back to the basic responsibilities of planning, synchronizing, and transporting commodities in support of maneuver commanders.

■ By Gen. Gustave “Gus” Perna



More than 17 years of war has taught us much. But as the Army's senior logistician, I am most concerned about what we have forgotten and how it jeopardizes readiness.

Forward operating base logistics separated logisticians from their core responsibilities. Decisions we made under predictable conditions served us well but resulted in the atrophy of our expeditionary logistics skills. Purposely or not, Soldiers and leaders were removed from readiness tasks.

Now it is time for logisticians to regain and exercise their expeditionary skills that will sustain us moving forward. Expeditionary skills include the fundamentals of deploying the force, opening ports and airfields, and setting and sustaining theaters in an evolving threat environment.

Luxuries of time, contractor sup-

port, and connectivity are unlikely to exist in upcoming wars. Future battlefields will require us to anticipate warfighters' needs, integrate logistics support, and respond rapidly with innovation, ingenuity, and agility.

As professionals, we must understand the battlefield by studying the terrain and the enemy situation. Ammunition, fuel, and water can become simply computations to logisticians, but they are more than math problems; they are readiness enablers.

At all levels, logisticians must inherently understand these numbers, recognize what it takes to support a brigade combat team, division, and corps during an offensive attack, and then execute.

Over the past decade, we got into the habit of merely managing commodities, and that behavior pattern should be wiped from our memory. We cannot wait for or rely on situation reports and logistics status reports. Logisticians must have battlefield situational awareness to be able to use information from radio chatter and other traditional methods to anticipate requirements.

Expeditionary battlefield logistics moves us beyond supply management. It takes us back to our core competencies and basic responsibilities to plan, integrate, synchronize, echelon, and transport commodities in support of the maneuver commander. It means every Soldier doing his or her job, including noncommissioned officers ful-

filling their roles as the backbone, warrant officers providing their technical expertise, and leaders understanding planning and operational risk.

Refining our expeditionary skills means grasping and executing the art and science of sustainment; it means we work those math problems and understand those numbers. We prepare our shipments with offloading in mind. Our equipment is well-maintained, combat-configured, and ready for both internal movement and external support.

Sustainment planning must incorporate leap-frog capability for scenarios in which sustainers are constantly moving and simultaneously supporting. These are the expeditionary skills sustainment organizations must perfect and demonstrate to survive on the battlefield.

When it is time to deploy, it is too late to practice battlefield sustainment skills. Logisticians must exercise and train on those skills today to be ready for the next contingency.

When we merge our expeditionary sustainment skills with our intrinsic expertise in forecasting, risk analysis, and supply chain management, we will be well-positioned to face our next challenge with courage and confidence.

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